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AMIALE AMELANCHIERS

Whether known as Juneberry, Shadblow, Shadbush, Sarvis, Serviceberry, Indian Pear or Currant Tree, all are Amelanchiers, a subdivision of the rose family comprising a group of top notch trees and shrubs endowed with a remarkable diversity of interests.

What some of these interests are and what characteristics furnish them may be learned by analyzing a few of the genera's various common names. In the New England States, for example, the early settlers called them Shadblows because their blossoming usually coincided with the time the shad began to ascend the tidal rivers. Sarvis or Serviceberry, an English corruption of the Latin word *Sorbus*, is the name of a related species from southern Europe, and refers to the juicy bluish black fruit highly esteemed by man and bird alike. The Canadian Indians knew the Amelanchiers as Indian Pears and in parts of the south the name Currant Tree prevails. Furthermore, ripening in June as most of them do, the appropriateness of the synonym, Juneberry, is obvious.

Thus far we have but hinted at the genera's landscape qualifications, for, being diversified interest plants, Amelanchiers have something to offer whatever the season. The winter aspect reveals the multiple trunked habit of the tree types, the smooth, close fitting steel gray bark divided into lengthwise brownish ridges and the pointed buds. Spring transforms the plants into masses of misty white loveliness, aptly referred to as "foam of thicket, copse and swamp." Simultaneously, or later, the leaf buds break, providing an added color note of bronze, reddish purple or felty white. The edible, delicately flavored blueberry-like fruits from a quarter to one half inch in diameter and borne in loose clusters on long stems have already been mentioned, but nothing has been said of the thin, alternately arranged ovate or broad oval leaves which hold their medium green color throughout the summer. The autumnal change is their crowning achievement, however, coppery orange, burnished gold or terra cotta supplanting the green.

Essentially North American plants, though as we have said a few

representatives of the genus also occur in Europe, Northern Africa, China and Japan, the range is a broad one, extending from Newfoundland southward to the Gulf and westward to Iowa, Kansas and Louisiana. All are hardy here, tolerant of our climatic extremes and alkaline soil, and of value for various landscape uses.

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The tallest, best known and most abundant species on the North American Continent is the Common or Downy Shadblow, *Amelanchier canadensis*, an arborescent form which has been known to develop into a round topped tree 50 ft. tall with a trunk twelve inches through. Obviously specimens this size are the exception, the more usual height and stature attained locally being 30 to 35 foot multiple trunked trees, narrow headed or of irregular contour. While not indigenous to the Arboretum, this Shadblow was at one time common on wooded banks and steep ravine slopes in the northern and southeastern parts of the Chicago region.

Coming into bloom early in the spring (late April or early May) before its leaves have attained any size and while they are still completely covered with soft white wool, the small nodding racemes of abundant, creamy white flowers present a blossom effect of misty loveliness. And, although their beauty is fleeting, the memory of it combined with blossoming Redbuds is not soon forgotten. In connection with the woolly coating of the leaves it should be mentioned that this is the only species having both upper and lower surfaces so covered.

The June borne fruits, berry-like depressed globular or pear shaped pomes, are rich purple in color with a slight bloom. As a rule they are sweet flavored although the quality seems to vary among individuals.

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For earliness and prolificacy of bloom the handsome Allegheny Shadblow, *Amelanchier laevis*, rates high in our appraisal. Like the Common Juneberry it is most often tree-like with multiple trunks of erect habit. It does not attain the height of the former, however, seldom exceeding 30 feet. In some habitats it assumes a more bushy form with irregular spreading branches. Preferring more moisture than "*canadensis*" it is apt to be found in damp ravines, on moist slopes or along the margins of lakes and ponds.

Blossom time is the season to compare it with the Common Shadblow, for then its special characteristics stand out most prominently. Its flowers are larger and whiter for one thing and borne in graceful loose, drooping racemes. Red bracts add to their beauty. There is also an attraction in the smooth bronze tinted new foliage as it breaks out of bud.

From a fruiting standpoint "*laevis*" does not differ essentially from "*canadensis*", bearing an abundance of good sized edible red berries turning dark purple as they ripen. Their sweet flavor and juiciness is much



The Allegheny Shadblow, *Amelanchier laevis*, native small tree valued for its earliness and prolificacy of bloom.

relished by birds, as well as by any humans who are fortunate enough to discover them first. The fall leaf color of the Allegheny Shadblow is as showy as any, ranging from the orange yellows to terra cotta and sometimes red. The winter bark is more conspicuous than some, its silvery gray smoothness figuring prominently in the winter landscape.

There is a pink budded form of the Allegheny Shadblow, too, *Amelanchier laevis* "Pink Flowered", a variety indigenous to certain wooded areas in the vicinity of Rochester, New York. Although distinctly pinkish in the bud stage, the blossoms open white.

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All of the finest qualities of the genus are combined in the Apple or Snowy Shadblow, *Amelanchier grandiflora*, a natural hybrid of "*canadensis*" and "*laevis*" found in a few localized areas of central New York state. There, growing on limestone outcrops overhanging deep ravines, it displays the rare natural charm which has made it such a desirable subject for landscaping.

Everything about the plant is pleasing. The graceful way it extends its horizontal branches gives it a singular picturesqueness, and growing wider than high, its contour is more like a crabapple or hawthorn. Twelve or fifteen feet is its usual height limit. The bronzy color of its newly unfolding leaves is also interesting, adding appreciably to the beauty of its loose, pendulous racemes of flowers, the largest, whitest and latest of all Shadblows. In common with the others, its late June ripening blue-black fruit is of good size and flavor, its autumnal foliage coloration worth noting and its bark silvery. To introduce a planting note of dramatic interest place a Snowy Shadblow where it will have a backdrop of dark needled conifers. The effect will be sure to please.

A pink flowered variation, *Amelanchier grandiflora rubescens*, like the Pink Flowered Allegheny Shadblow, is pinkest in the bud stage, the color quickly fading after the flowers have opened.

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Of the shrubby types the Running Amelanchier, *Amelanchier stolonifera* (syn. *spicata*), is one of the most desirable, being a low grower, usually less than 5 ft. in height, with an interesting irregular branch structure. In the wild it is often stoloniferous, a growth characteristic suggesting its use in naturalistic plantings.

Considering floral structure the creamy flowers are smaller than any of those previously mentioned and borne in short, upright, four to ten flowered racemes. They follow the Allegheny Shadblow in the blossom sequence. It is almost July before the bloomy, purplish black fruit matures, quarter inch diameter pomes of sweet flavor. Elliptical or oval leaves rounded at both ends and with sharply serrate margins serve as a further means of differentiation. They are densely grayish tomentose below when

young, medium green in summer and in autumn show typical *Amelanchier* coloration.

The species is native of the Atlantic coastal plain from Newfoundland and Maine to Virginia, inhabiting dry, rocky areas and often sandy wastelands where it may spread to form broad colonies.

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While various other species will be found in the Arboretum *Amelanchier* collection, those cited may be considered the most valuable ornamentally. From the standpoint of length of time in cultivation, however it might be of interest to know that the European Service Berry or Snowy Mespilus, *Amelanchier ovalis* (syn. *vulgaris*), an erect branched shrubby native of the mountains of Central and Southern Europe, has been grown since 1596. For landscape purposes it does not equal our own natives.

Summary of Special Uses Illustrating the Versatility of the *Amelanchiers*

To provide early blossom (Late April, Early May)

To furnish berries for the birds (June, July)

To contribute to the fall foliage color display (October)

To add bark and twig interest to the winter landscape

To help create naturalistic landscapes

- a. along boundaries
- b. along woodland margins
- c. along fence rows
- d. in wild gardens

To add interest to foundation plantings by helping break monotonous roof lines

To provide height and accent in plantings at the corners of buildings

To frame picture windows

E. L. Kammerer

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